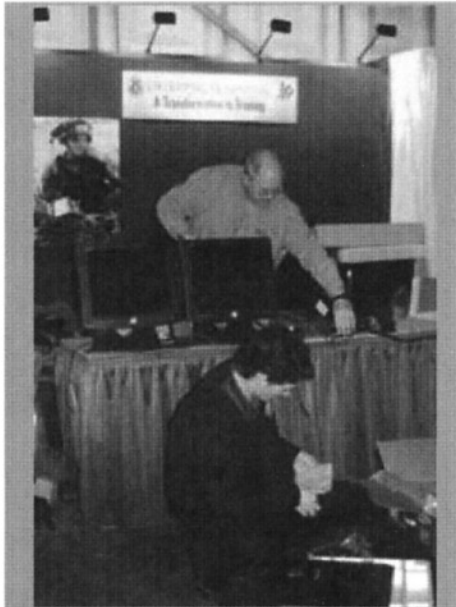


## Signal Center begins process of building lifelong learning throughout Training and Doctrine Command



Story by Sgt. Ryan Matson/*The Signal*  
Photo by Pvt. Armando Monroig/*The Signal*

**FORT GORDON, Ga.** (TRADOC News Service, Dec. 11, 2003) -- A training concept that started on Fort Gordon is spreading to all the schools in the Army's Training and Doctrine Command.

TRADOC appointed Fort Gordon's Directorate of Training as the executive agent to write the implementation plans for establishing lifelong learning centers at the posts where TRADOC has schools and other mission activities (32 schools on 15 installations).

"We came up with this idea about 2 1/2 years ago, and the Army kind of liked what they heard, but, rightfully so, were in a state of, 'You guys kick this can down the road and we'll see how it works,'" said Col. William Wilson, director of training for the U.S. Army Signal Center and Fort Gordon. "Well, we've done that now for 2 1/2 years, and based on what the Army's going to be doing in the future and what they've seen us doing, they see a marriage about to take place and they're willing to allow us to expand that to the other schools. It's going to take a while before this is standardized to all the schools, but this is the first step in doing so."

A conference involving all the schools in TRADOC will be held on post Dec. 16-18 to start the process of helping the schools build a plan to implement lifelong learning centers at their locations.

"They're going to find out what we're doing, and we're going to help them apply this capability to their schools," Wilson said.

Wilson said DOT will submit a plan March 1 to TRADOC headquarters to establish a program objective memorandum for establishing the centers at the various schoolhouses throughout the TRADOC system. This plan will include estimates of what it will cost each post to set up a lifelong learning center.

Wilson said he is not sure when the actual construction of lifelong learning centers at each TRADOC post will begin -- TRADOC must first review the plans.

So what exactly is lifelong learning and why has TRADOC deemed it worthy of spreading to all the schools within the command?

Barbara Walton, the chief of the University of Information Technology Division for DOT, described lifelong learning as a situation in which new Soldiers are learning their job from the point of their enlistment until the day they leave the military.

Lifelong learning was developed here as a response to lengthening advanced individual training courses, Walton said. She said due to the technical nature of the military occupational specialties taught here, AIT courses were becoming longer as technology constantly changed.

"When a Soldier who had just completed a 40-week AIT got to the field, it could be a challenge to recall skills learned in Week 1 or 2 of the course and apply them to

Workers from the University of Information Technology set up a display at the recent Signal Symposium about the Lifelong Learning Center. The Directorate of Training was recently named the TRADOC executive agent for lifelong learning.

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equipment specific to that unit. It's easy to identify with this. I can't remember much of what I learned in U.S. history on graduation day," she said.

"It's in the developmental process and has been for 2 1/2 years," Wilson said. "We're using tenets of lifelong learning today at Fort Gordon and throughout the regiment."

The four tenets of lifelong learning Wilson speaks of make the process possible. The tenets are important to understand the lifelong learning concept.

### **Assignment-oriented training**

The first tenet is AOT, or assignment-oriented training, which is tailoring AIT schooling to the Soldier's first duty station.

"It is a program designed to shorten the resident course of an MOS," Wilson explained. "Before AOT, we'd take an MOS and try to teach (Soldiers) all the critical tasks related to that MOS, regardless of where they were going to be."

"The problem we had with that is, if you're taught something and you don't reinforce it, the chances are you're going to forget a great deal of that, and that's particularly true in technical skills. That Soldier who may have spent three or four years in a division-and-below assignment, and then immediately gets sent to a corps-and-above assignment, more than likely would have forgotten a lot of what they were taught at AIT.

"Instead of doing that, we're going to only focus them in the skill sets and equipment required for that first unit and only train them on that," Wilson said.

But if a Soldier is only taught what he or she needs to know for his or her first duty assignment, what happens when they change duty assignments and go from working for an echelon-above-corps assignment to an echelon-below-corps assignment? As Wilson explained, under lifelong learning they will not undergo the expensive process of being sent back to school.

"We don't necessarily have to bring you back into the schoolroom," Wilson said. "We can deliver the content to you there just as though you were sitting in the schoolhouse, and manage you as a student even though you're not sitting in the schoolhouse walls.

"If a piece of equipment changes and we never trained you on it in the schoolhouse, we'll have that information packaged and ready for you at Fort Gordon because you're registered in the University of Information Technology, which is what the resource center for lifelong learning entity here at Fort Gordon is called," he said. "We will have that content available for you, we'll send you an e-mail, tell you to go back into the homepage and when you do, all that information will be deliverable to you; all you have to do is draw it out."

The students, instead of being sent back to Fort Gordon, will learn their new skills over the Internet and by using computer programs. "Our objective is to use technology to provide that training to the Soldier virtually, without having to bring him/her back," Walton said.

### **Simulations**

Simulations, the second tenet of lifelong learning, are computer programs that mimic a piece of actual equipment a Soldier needs to be trained on. They allow a student to simulate working on a piece of equipment without actually physically having that piece of equipment.

Walton said the advantages to this type of training are numerous. For example, since the training is done using a computer program, it can be done at any time, anywhere.

Another huge advantage of this type of training is the potential cost-saving ability. Walton explained that since a lot of Signal equipment Soldiers train on is very expensive, simulating it on a computer is an excellent alternative. This way, everyone who fixes a multi-thousand dollar radio doesn't have to actually have the radio, and other Soldiers don't have to share the equipment and limit the time they get to use it.

Since Soldiers are using a mouse and a screen to learn from rather than an expensive piece of equipment, costly accidents are also avoided.

Also, the Soldier can't get physically hurt by simulating fixing something and making a mistake on the computer. Instead, the computer will give the student hints on how to fix his mistake.

"We hope to be able to use simulations products, especially in the technical skills, to take our Soldiers up to about the 90-percent competency level and then they will validate those skills on the actual equipment," Wilson said. "So now you're not breaking stuff as much as you used to when you were training Soldiers, and you don't need as much of the equipment to do the training anymore, so you're saving the Army a bunch of money."

But do these simulations programs work? Walton cited research studies that back the effectiveness of simulations and Wilson gave one familiar example.

"We have found that in technical skills, especially, simulations are very good for teaching those skills. If you stop and think of how many times a shuttle astronaut flies the shuttle before he goes up on his mission, the answer is zero," Wilson said. "He learns through simulations products and simulators."

"If you stop and think about the generation we're training, these young people grew up with them (simulations.) They have been playing video games since the day they were born and are very comfortable with the technology they are using," Wilson said.

Apparently using simulations to learn also has an element of fun to it as well.

"We have found that in the testing of some of these simulations products, that at two o'clock in the morning we have to tell the young Soldier to go to bed, you've got class tomorrow. It's a whole different approach to the generation we're trying to address."

Still another advantage to learning through the PC is that it directly plays into the lifelong learning process.

By learning through lessons on the computer, the student can continue learning indefinitely as long as material is available. He can even get ahead and learn more advanced parts of his job or other related MOSs.

As Wilson admitted, this training is based on the responsibility and motivation of the individual Soldier to learn on their own.

"If you look at the Chief of Staff of the Army, he just put out a new statement on the warrior ethos and it's a lot like the Boy Scout motto: be prepared," Wilson said. "The responsibility of you remaining a competent professional in the profession of arms, part of that responsibility rests with you. It's transforming with culture."

### **The Lifelong Learning Center**

The third tenet of lifelong learning is the Lifelong Learning Center. The center is an actual physical place, located in Brems Barracks on post. It is where all content for the lifelong learning program is stored, including simulations and other types of interactive multimedia, Walton said.

"We're loading all that content, creating that content and making it ready for use at the



Lifelong Learning Center," Wilson said. "That process is ongoing. The next step is setting up lifelong learning centers at all the TRADOC installations and the budget process to facilitate the school to deliver their content."

The plan for the Lifelong Learning Center is that Soldiers anywhere in the world can log on to the material found there because it is linked to Army Knowledge On-line, Walton said. They can do this at any time and can also receive help from a subject matter expert at any time, she said.

Wilson added that though the Soldier is learning over the computer, there is still interaction with the teacher.

"We will also deliver direct interaction with the teacher," Wilson said. "At the Lifelong Learning Center, we will actually deliver an instructor videostreaming the teaching of that lecture as though you were actually in the classroom. You have the capability, through interacting with the Lifelong Learning Center, to come back in and ask questions on-line, and even come up on a screen and schedule time with subject matter experts if you need help with something."

"We have the technical capability to reach out to where you are, take control of your laptop or PC and move your mouse around and lead you step-by-step through the process from right here. So there is interaction."

## **Virtual campuses**

The final tenet of UIT are virtual campuses. A virtual campus is any location where there are lifelong learners in need of information from the Signal proponent.

Walton said a virtual campus can be a deployed Soldier who is learning his special assignment on the computer or an Army Distance Learning facility classroom link to the network. She said many times it will be units seeking more information.

"We're using new methods and technologies to create that environment of lifelong learning -- to be able to learn, grow and achieve, regardless of where you're located," Wilson said.

Walton said lifelong learning is already underway. The 31R MOS was the test group, having begun in October 2001. Wilson said that in 2004, 7,000 Signal Soldiers will have been trained under the new lifelong learning AOT principles.

Wilson said while lifelong learning can further enhance and reinforce skills taught in AIT, AIT will still continue for Soldiers to get their initial MOS training.


"There will always be resident schools, and a time and a place for Soldiers to go to those schools," Wilson said.

The new AIT training will also offer Soldiers an introduction to the new lifelong learning concept and how to use it, Wilson added.

"One of the things we will teach our enlisted Soldiers and officers when they come to initial entry training is how to become lifelong learners," Wilson said. "How do you go to a URL on a webpage and download all this training and education content? How do you find stuff, move around and use the new tools, technology and methodology? Just like in basic training, when you learned first aid and how to fire an M-16, you're going to learn the knowledge, skills and attributes to become a lifelong learner, so when you leave here and need to find out something new you will have learned the process at IET."

Wilson said lifelong learning is really just a way of keeping up with changes in technology.

"The cellphone you're carrying now is probably different from the cellphone you carried a



year ago. The computer you're using now is a Pentium IV instead of a Pentium III. All those changes are happening very rapidly, and these are the same capabilities the Army needs in the field and we're responsible for that," Wilson said. "In the old days, the only option was to take Soldiers and bring them in a resident schoolhouse, and we can't afford to do that."

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